

THE
CONDUCT
OF THE

Royal Academicians,

While MEMBERS of the
Incorporated Society of ARTISTS
OF
GREAT BRITAIN,

From the Year 1760, to their Expulsion
in the Year 1769,

With some Part of their TRANSACTIONS since.

*Nam fore maxima pars morem hunc hominis habent;
Dum id impetrant boni sunt, sed ubi jam penes se habent;
Ex bebis pessimi, et fraudulentissimi sum.*

PLAUT.

L O N D O N:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

WHEREAS certain anonymous writers have, since the defection and expulsion of those artists, who now compose the royal academy, from the incorporated society of artists of Great Britain, published several letters in the public prints, wherein they declare themselves friends and fellows of the said society. This is therefore to assure the impartial public, that the said society are entirely unacquainted with the authors in question, and do altogether disavow the aforesaid productions, the following being the only tract ever published, with their knowledge, on the occasion.

T H B

C O N D U C T,

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AS it is not unusual to make appeals to the public in matters in which they are not concerned, it cannot, we hope, be deemed impertinent, that we address them on the following occasion, in which we humbly suppose they are. For being naturally the guardians of all those, who by laudable and ingenious pursuits, are candidates for their favour and support, we imagine they have a just right to con-
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sider themselves as interested, and will not fail to interpose their protection, when they find any sinister practices, or unfair interruptions thrown in the way of such as they would encourage or defend.

The late defection of part of the incorporated society of artists of Great Britain, (some of whom had been directors in that society) has for a time engaged the attention of many, and it seems but a necessary mark of respect, to endeavour to satisfy the enquiries of those, for whose favour, both parties profess themselves candidates.

This appears the more necessary, as the true causes of those feuds and animosities, which subsisted among us, while they were part of our body, are not generally known; the public, notwithstanding their attention to matters in which they are much more concerned, may be curious to know the reason of our division, and particularly by what means an inconsiderable junto, to
say

say no worse, have been able to obtain the favour and encouragement of our most gracious sovereign, in preference to a dutiful and loyal society, which he had so lately honoured with his royal charter.

To this end we shall endeavour to shew, what the concurrent circumstances were by which those gentlemen became directors, the use they made of that power while it continued in their hands, with their practices to render it permanent; their extraordinary conduct, when they imagined their point gained, and their power secure; and their more extraordinary conduct on being removed from the directorship, and since.

We shall therefore begin somewhat earlier than the æra of exhibitions; chusing to say more than some may think strictly necessary, rather than leave the expectations of others unsatisfied, by
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saying what they probably may think less.

At the time above mentioned, the artists of this kingdom seemed few in number, and fewer of note; they however held assemblies at stated periods, (the affairs of which were managed by a committee of sixteen, chosen annually) and supported a small academy in St. Martin's-lane, by a subscription among themselves; at which place most of the present artists received the rudiments of their education in the art of design; for the rest, they were generally speaking, the property of picture-dealers; (at that time their chief employers) and held by them, in somewhat the same kind of vassallage and dependance, that many authors are by booksellers at this day.

In this constrained situation, their thoughts and discourse at their several meetings, generally turned on the hard
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treatment they found; and naturally terminated in wishes and projects for the removal of those difficulties and impediments, under which they laboured. In these conversations the method most generally offered and approved, was the establishment of a public academy, as the most likely means to attract the notice of the public, and facilitate improvement; but this however desirable, appeared on closer inspection to be attended with such difficulties, as proved an effectual bar to its success; and therefore, after some fruitless attempts to procure assistance, from the *dilettante* and others, with which it is needless to trouble our readers, the design dropped.

Accident has often been observed to produce, what the utmost efforts of industry have failed to accomplish; and something of that kind seems to have happened here. As liberty has ever been considered the friend and parent of the fine arts, it is

natural for their professors to revere the memory of all those who were the champions and effortors of that invaluable blessing, particularly those of our own country: on this principle it was, that the artists we are now speaking of, had an annual meeting at the Foundling-hospital, to commemorate the landing of King William. To this charity several of their body had made donations in painting, sculpture, &c. which being accessible to the public, made those artists more generally known than others; and this circumstance it was, that first suggested an exhibition; which was no sooner proposed, than approved; the committee consequently, who were the proposers, received directions to issue proper notices of the intention; the performances of many ingenious men, hitherto unknown, were received, and on the 21st day of April, 1760, an exhibition was opened at the great room, belonging to the society of arts, manufactures and commerce in the Strand: on which it will be sufficient to observe, that

that the success was equal to the most sanguine expectations; the public were pleased, and the artists applauded; those already known received additional reputation; and such as were not, became the immediate acquaintance of the public.

If the above success, had not alone been sufficient to dispose the exhibitors to the most favorable sentiments of the committee, the generous motives they took care to assign for this new measure, could not fail to do it; which were “ to call forth
 “ that modest-merit to the eye of the
 “ public, which otherwise must have languished in obscurity; and that those
 “ whose abilities and attainments, might
 “ justly raise them to distinction, should
 “ have an opportunity afforded them, of
 “ shewing their claim to it.” Sentiments such as these, could not fail to gain them the entire confidence and good opinion of the society, and therefore at the succeeding election, the assembly very readily came

into a proposal made by one of the members, that their affairs should be governed for the year ensuing, by those who had so laudably conducted them the year past : a motion in which there seems to have been much more candour, than policy ; however it passed with scarce any opposition.

Praise and commendation have generally very ill effects on little or depraved minds, even where they happen to deserve it ; which observation was here sufficiently proved and illustrated : for the applause and encomium which the committee received on this occasion, instead of stimulating them to further measures for the public good, only suggested an opportunity of converting the popular opinion to their own private advantage ; and how little soever our knowledge of the men, inclined us to suspect them of political talents, yet they soon convinced us, that when public trust had once furnished them with the means, they

they could find sufficient abilities to direct it to this end.

A new and pleasing prospect however seem'd now to open to the artists; connoisseurs, and picture-dealers, were no longer in question; the public now knew where to find those whose labours had attracted their regards, and the former scene of iniquity, was happily, and entirely removed; the artists now exerted all their powers in their respective studies; a visible improvement was observed in each succeeding exhibition, and the attention and encouragement of the public, proportionably excited; by which means the society, as I shall henceforth call them, were not only enabled to relieve their indigent brethren, their widows, and orphans, but also to lay by a fund for future occasions.

The attention of the society was too much engaged with their present happiness, and the prospect of its increase, to

entertain any suspicion of its being suddenly obstructed or disturbed; they never dreamed they had any objects to fear, after those from whom they found themselves delivered: but here they were mistaken; the committee were sagacious enough, not to let slip those advantages which the unsuspecting security, and good opinion of the society had put into their hands; to secure which they very soon formed the following resolutions at their board, without troubling the society for their participation or consent; first that the arrangement or disposition of the several performances at all exhibitions, should be absolutely left to the then subsisting committee; they next resolved that a president and secretary to the society, should be chosen by themselves out of their own body; they resolved that if any member of the committee, should resign, &c. the choice of another to fill the vacancy, should be in themselves; and lastly (by injunction) that the resolutions of the committee should be kept a profound

found secret from the society, except when it was indispensably necessary to act otherwise. They afterwards by a comprehensive partiality at exhibitions, to those whose productions could neither excite envy nor apprehension of competition, enlarged their bottom, formed attachments, and created dependencies, to secure a sufficient number of votes at all future elections; and in other respects acted with a diligence and wariness that shewed them to be no contemptible politicians.

These points being secure, the several members of the society soon found at the succeeding exhibitions, that in the arrangement of the performances, as well as in the demeanour of the gentlemen of the committee themselves, there appeared something very different from those professions of public spirit and disinterestedness, on which they had set out. They saw their own works placed in the most obscure and distant places, and otherwise so industriously

ously put out of sight, that the public, instead of being able to judge of their merit, were very often at a loss to tell what they were †; and on the other hand the most conspicuous situations, were carefully selected for the performances of the committee, and some favoured adherents, whose

† Had the junto been content with occupying the best situations for their own performances, the society would probably have borne it without much complaint; but possessing all the principal lights themselves, would not content them, without excluding all such as were of dangerous merit, from approaching them: of which humour the following, however ridiculous, is yet a necessary instance. One of the committee occupied as usual, two principal situations; in one of which he hung a picture of her majesty, and in the other, that of a lady of quality. The carpenters going to place a fine piece of shipping belonging to a celebrated artist in that branch of painting, over that of the queen, the director called out with great vehemence, "You must not hang that picture there: Why?" "It will hurt my queen." Accordingly it was taken to the opposite end of the room, when the director called out with still more violence, "It must not be hung there," Why, Sir? "O! it will kill my dutchess."

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abilities did not seem to merit such distinction; so that the exhibition which ought to be an advantage to all, was really a detriment to many, as it put them to a trouble and expence, from whence they derived no sort of benefit. Complaints on these occasions were generally answered with a furliness little short of insult, and not without some hints and gesticulations, which seemed to signify, that we must no longer look upon them in the familiar light we used, but that they expected to be considered as our superiors.

In order therefore to shew how justly this claim was founded, it is necessary to observe in this place, that the society's choice of a committee, would naturally have fallen on the most eminent artists, such having fewest temptations to partiality or injustice, but that those frequently declined to accept of it; and such as did, very rarely attended, through the multiplicity of their own business; hence it was, that two thirds of the

the committee were chosen from the least conspicuous of the whole body, who being constantly present on all occasions, the whole business of the society fell naturally into their hands, and lay entirely at their mercy: and therefore to secure it still further, they about this time proposed to have their number augmented, from sixteen to twenty four, and were powerful enough to have it passed; all which being sure votes at every election, rendered them, with the assistance of their allies, an overmatch for the abused part of the society at least, if not for the whole; and they accordingly set them at defiance.

From symptoms such as these, it is not much to be wondered at, that several of the leading, and disinterested members of the society, began to be alarmed; they perceived how industriously the committee had made concealed advances to power and despotism, and therefore had their suspicions, that something more formidable than the
occasion

occasion of the present murmurs was intended. They could not conceive why the committee appeared so anxious, and took so much pains to be continued in an office, that ought to bring them nothing but trouble, and avocation from their own private affairs; unless they had views very different from what was at first so speciously pretended.

Actuated therefore by these apprehensions, they turned their thoughts and endeavours, on some establishment, as well to secure the sum they had acquired, as to create respect, and procure permanency. They repeatedly offered their thoughts, and recommended measures on this head, to the general meetings, and always found themselves as constantly opposed, by the same set of men, all of them of the committee; such invariable opposition, to intentions evidently calculated for the publick good, gave daily increase both to their suspicions, and impatience; and therefore, among
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many other means suggested for their security, that of obtaining a charter being most approved, a resolution was formed, to move the general meeting, that the necessary steps might be taken to obtain it. This was found highly expedient, not only to secure the property, but the independency of the society; as it now became sufficiently apparent, that the committee aimed at nothing less than the government of the whole community, and if they succeeded in their intentions, the members saw it would be but changing one set of oppressors for another, as it appeared pretty plainly, that the gentlemen of the committee, and a dealer in pictures, were equally actuated by sentiments of justice and candour.

Accordingly, at the next general meeting, a motion was made to solicit his Majesty to incorporate the society by charter; this, as was expected, was strongly opposed by every leading member, among those who have since set up their standard
against

against the society; great confusion arose on the debates, and much more heat and animosity expressed, than could be well supposed to be excited on so fair and disinterested a motion; however the designs of the committee, to shackle and subdue their brethren, was so fully exposed on this occasion, that on the worthy president's putting the question, almost every hand was held up for it. A committee was therefore appointed to prepare the form of the charter, and a petition to his majesty on that occasion; the prayer of which he was graciously pleased to grant the 26th day of January, 1765.

The charter was thus obtained, and with a degree of moderation seldom practiced, in order if possible to reconcile the committee to the interests of the society, they were nominated the first directors under it, (by which appellation they are to be hereafter distinguished, as the other members are by that of fellows) however,

Sir Joshua Reynolds, (who at that time, at least, neither espoused, nor countenanced their measures,) thought proper to refuse. A code of laws was framed for the government of the society, and an obligation for each member to subscribe.

Here we find the minutes of the *junto* destroyed from the 19th of November, 1764, to the 11th of March, 1765; doubtless for very *prudential* reasons; and therefore we shall only observe, that about this time the directors, fearing the charter might be thought to invalidate, or render disputeable, the power they had conferred on themselves of arranging and disposing the performances at all exhibitions, they at the next general meeting having collected their forces, made a motion that the aforesaid power should still continue in their hands, and they had a sufficient number of votes to carry it.

The interests of the Society were as much invaded in every other department; the

the right which the fellows had of recommending objects to be relieved by the society's charity, they took care to render useless, by taking no notice of any, who did not come recommended by one of their own body; of which we could give pretty strong specimens, but having materials more than sufficient of another kind, we shall in this particular spare both the reader and ourselves.

We had resolved, on beginning this discourse, to trouble our readers with but a small part of the conduct of the directors; and it is but just, that we here make our best acknowledgements, for the great helps they have been pleased to afford us, towards preserving our intention; as it must certainly have been for that reason, and *no other*, that we here in a second place, find their minutes carefully destroyed, to the extent of nine months and upwards; viz. from the 13th of June, 1765, to the 21st of March, 1766.

The

The 3d of June, 1766, on Mr. Moser's representation of the low estate of the academy in St. Martin's-lane; it was resolved, to take into consideration the state of that academy, and to supply the deficiencies of the subscription, out of the society's fund: and in March following the society having resolved to establish a public academy, the former being found insufficient for themselves, and their pupils, the aforesaid Mr. Moser, reported that his majesty intended to take that particular under his royal protection; on which the above resolution was repealed, as appears by the following minute of the society.

General Meeting, June 2, 1767.

Resolved,

“ That the resolution, which mentions that the directors should proceed to consider of a form, for instituting a public academy, be repealed; his majesty having been graciously pleased to declare his royal
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intention of taking the academy under his protection," — on which occasion, as indeed on every other, the society expressed the utmost gratitude and affection to his majesty, for his most gracious declaration, and attention to the fine arts.

The injustice of the junto, being rather increased than abated on being appointed the first directors under the charter, the complaints and murmurs of the injured part of the society increased in proportion; to put an end to which, a by-law was proposed, to elect eight new directors every year; consequently that but sixteen of the old ones should be re-elected; by which regulation it was hoped, all occasion of complaint would cease; but this the directors could not be prevailed upon to listen to, and therefore on the approach of the festival of St. Luke, several of the fellows, having met to consider of some means to obtain fair treatment, their deliberations ended in a resolution to send circular letters
to

to the rest, to meet at a place appointed, in order to put in nomination, such persons to be directors for the year ensuing, as they thought would act with justice and impartiality.

On the appearance of those letters, the directors took the alarm; and immediately published a fulminating advertisement for a general meeting, to enquire into the conduct of the parties who had subscribed and dispersed them; and afterwards with a sagacity peculiar to themselves, they consulted a person eminent in the law, to know whether they had a power to pass any censure on the intended victims, or not, and were answered in the negative.

On finding their error, they would gladly have dropped the question at the ensuing meeting; but the society were too much disgusted at the procedure and intentions of the junto, to let the matter pass without discussion: several gentlemen, who had hitherto

thereto been neutral or silent, gave their sentiments very freely on the present conduct of the directors, which they observed, "sufficiently explained the past: they saw very plainly, that the present, was an abortive attempt to expell, or otherwise injure, two of the fellows, whose only crime was an avowal of their good intentions to the test; and that, in order to terrify the society into submission, to whatever they should think proper to impose for the future," — much more was said to the same purpose: the directors were unable to reply, and consequently obliged to give up every point urged against them; to erase from their minutes the aforesaid advertisement, and make an apology in the public papers, for inserting it.

Though we doubt not the reader has by this time formed a pretty just idea of the principles as well as practice of the junto, yet we beg leave to mention one circumstance, however unnecessary to his con-

viction. They imagined on the above occasion, it would in some measure mend the aspect of their affairs, if they could prevent the disgrace of being compelled to obliterate the aforesaid advertisement from their minutes: they therefore thought it better, to try whatever their interest or address could do, rather than submit to it. Accordingly a ballot for the motion was demanded. Their friend the secretary on this occasion, going to deliver the balls, was challenged by one of the fellows as an interested person, and the porter to the society, was nominated to perform that office; on which another of the fellows very much improved the hint, by proposing, that the door should be locked, and the key laid before the president; in order, that when the ballot was closed, it might be known, whether the number of balls agreed with the number of gentlemen present: how far these precautions were necessary we shall not pretend to determine, but immediately on their being proposed, the directors declined the ballot, and gave up the question. They

They left nothing untried to prevent this untoward accident affecting their interest at the approaching election: they canvassed and cajoled, promised and besought; represented the leaders of the opposition, as designing men, who only wanted to deprive them of power, in order to engross it themselves; and in all other respects, employed their diligence so well, against those, who scorned to take the same kind of pains to counteract it, that they were every one returned directors for the year ensuing.

The society however, after some struggles, having at length obtained a resolution, to have the by-law, proposing eight new directors every year, &c. laid before some person eminent in the law for their opinion: The junta began their administration that year, by acquainting the society, that they had obtained an opinion thereupon; which

being read, was intirely against such by-law, as contrary to the charter; at which the fellows were very much disappointed, and therefore it was resolved, at the same meeting, that the attorney-general's opinion should be taken, which was agreed should be decisive, and binding on both parties.

This however being neglected the old murmurs revived, with proportional increase, from fresh provocations; the late request and resolution of the society, appeared so reasonable, that several of the directors themselves acknowledged it, and did voluntarily promise, to resign, in order to make vacancies for a change; but this they either wanted resolution to do, or were differently persuaded by the rest, and therefore the candid proposers, who were then, and continue still the firm friends of the society, thought it most adviseable to remain also.

After

After various delays on the part of the directors, and many importunities and remonstrances on the part of the society, they at length, with much unwillingness applied to the attorney-general, who gave his opinion on the following case, both which we lay before our readers.

C A S E.

BY royal charter of this date,
 26 Jan. (a printed copy whereof is
 5th Geo. III. left herewith, for your perusal and consideration) the society of artists of Great Britain, are authorised and directed from time to time, to nominate and chuse once in every year twenty-four fit and able persons to be directors of their body corporate; whereof the president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary for the time being, always shall be four. And the society have hitherto proceeded in the choice and manner of election

tion of directors conformable to the directions of their charter.

But in both the annual elections of directors, the majority of votes on the ballots being in favour of the same persons (a few excepted) who were nominated and appointed by the charter, many of the fellows of the society are much dissatisfied: and therefore at a general meeting of the society they came to a resolution to make a by-law, to render a certain number (not exceeding one third) of the directors, incapable of being elected directors of the society, for the year ensuing. Your opinion is therefore desired;

I. Whether the directors are bound to take into consideration, the framing a by-law, which they think inconsistent with the charter, though a resolution for that purpose has been carried at a general meeting.

II. Whe-

II. Whether any by-law to deprive a director of the privilege of being re-elected, at any annual election, will or will not be inconsistent with, and repugnant to the directions of the charter.

Dat. *July 26, 1768.*

A N S W E R.

I. I think the directors are under no legal obligation of taking into consideration a resolution of a general meeting in order to form it into a by-law; because the charter having given a special power of making laws thereby, as I apprehend, excludes the general powers, which would otherwise have belonged to the body at large. By the charter the directors are to make laws, but the body has the power of rejecting or approving. But though the directors are not bound to receive such regulations, they will consider how far it may be prudent to receive them; since the same majority which resolved, may unite in electing directors

tors of the same opinion with themselves; especially in the case of resolutions that appear to be reasonable and proper.

For, II. I am of opinion, that such by-law as is proposed, is not inconsistent with the charter, but is a regulation of the mode of elections; to prevent the whole power of the society being engrossed by a part; and to leave a share of the direction in some small degree, more open to the community.

William de Grey, Aug. 3d, 1768.

The reader will see without our intimation, that the case on which the above opinion was given, is framed with a very laudable degree of ingenuity; for the author there conveys an idea, that the same persons had been re-elected but once, who had been re-elected eight times successively, viz. from the year 1760 to 1768 inclusive, and consequently, that the complaints of the society, were the more likely to appear unreasonable or premature. Then the proposal

posul to elect eight new directors every year, being ingeniously termed " a law to render eight directors incapable," it was hoped would on a sudden view, appear unjust, and confirm the former opinion : but it unfortunately happening, that the attorney-general was a person of a tolerable share of ingenuity also, tho' of an opposite kind, all this hopeful management came to nothing.

Immediately on reading the above opinion to the society, a motion for the by-law was made and seconded, which the directors opposed with all their might ; and when put in mind of the expediency of a little candour, and the observance of their promise, they very fairly declared their contempt of both ; however a ballot being demanded, it was carried against them.

The 9th of September following, the directors being alarmed at the above determination of the society, met and came to the following resolution.

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“ Resolved,

“ That as making a law to exclude directors from being chosen the succeeding year, would be an attack upon the freedom of elections, a dangerous innovation of our charter, and an ungrateful return to directors for their trouble and care, in the management of the business of the society ;
 † *We are clearly of opinion* no such law

† These gentlemen, however, have since become *clearly* of a different opinion, for on the establishment of the royal academy, they adopted this very regulation, with the addition of still more rigorous restrictions, as appears by the following law, abstracted from what they call “ the instrument of institution of the royal academy ;” viz. *The seats in council* (which are but eight, and the president,) *shall go by succession, to all the members of the society* — four of the council shall be voted out every year, and these shall not occupy their seats in council *till all the rest have served.* — Thus what they called an “ attack upon the freedom of elections, a dangerous innovation, &c.” in the society, is a just, expedient and salutary measure in the royal academy ; on which the reader will make his own remarks.

should

should pass, therefore we have rejected the proposal.

“ We hope the impartial part of the society, will think we acted right, with regard to the many attempts which have been made in the society to bring such a law to bear, we look upon them as the efforts of a few designing persons, and as they have always been preferred with clamour and indecent behaviour, it cannot be expected that we should pay any attention to them.

“ But that the impartial, and respectable part of the society may not misinterpret our *firmness*, and imagine that we have any intention to keep possession of that power which the society hath vested in us; eight of the present directors have agreed voluntarily to resign their directorships, before the day of the succeeding election, and to render themselves incapable of serving for the ensuing year, and their particular names will be specified in the balloting lists.

"This step has been thought proper at the present juncture, in order to restore peace to the society (if possible) but it is expressly stipulated, that it shall not on any pretence whatever be construed into a precedent, as we are absolutely resolved to deliver up the directorship to our successors, undivested of any more of their privileges."

There is but little occasion in this place we believe, to supply our readers with observations on the candour, any more than on the modesty of a set of gentlemen, who give us under their hand, that they are *clearly of opinion* contrary to the attorney-general in a point of law; — however, they on recollection thought themselves too bountiful in the above, and therefore on the 19th of the same month they reversed their intention, and resolved to read, only the first part of their resolution to the society, and suppress the rest, as appears by the following minute.

Sept.

Sept. 19, 1768, at a meeting of directors, &c.

‘ Read the last minutes for considering, the passing a law to deprive eight directors from being re-elected, *and confirmed to — “should pay any attention to them” — the latter part concerning the resignation rejected*, the former to be read to the general meeting to-morrow evening.’ — Here, as there can be no great danger of our readers “misinterpreting the directors *firmness* and intention, &c.” we shall let this also pass without a comment.

About this time, or shortly after, the society agreed to make an exhibition for the king of Denmark; and at the same time resolved, that none should be admitted but his majesty, and those to whom the tickets issued for his use should be directed: yet notwithstanding this resolution, Mr. Chambers, one of the directors, obtained twelve tickets for his particular friends,

friends; though one of the greatest ladies in England had been refused admittance by his polite associates.

This act of the directors, in open contempt of the resolutions of the society, and particularly their indecency to a character too exalted, and universally esteemed, to require a particular exception, in the general regulations of the exhibition, co-operating with late and former provocations, inflamed the whole community with indignation and chagrin; the majority now saw with astonishment how much they were abused, and how little reason they had to believe from the suggestions of the junto, that the leaders of the opposition, had any other views than the general good, and safety of the society; they perceived that many acts of injustice, which though imagined at the time, to proceed from the private pique of a few individuals, were the gradual advances of a regular sap, intended
against

against the rights and liberties of the whole; and the present conduct of the directors, (who from their success at the last election, considered their power as immoveable, and consequently that it was beneath them to manage, or preserve appearances any longer) continuing to enforce these sentiments, almost the whole society, adopted, from conviction, the sense of the opposition, and at the following election, voted out no less than sixteen,

On this event, the new directors thought it their duty, to begin by making the bye law for changing eight directors annually; on which occasion the aforesaid Mr. Chambers could not contain his intemperance, but broke forth into much coarseness, and indecency of expression; however from some hints he received, he thought proper to make very sufficient apologies.

Shortly

Shortly after, the society received intelligence that the displaced directors, in conjunction with the eight that remained, had prepared a petition, which some of their party, through the easy access they had, were to deliver to his Majesty; setting forth the great hardships and unjust treatment they had suffered from the society of artists, and praying a separate institution, and his Royal protection to a loyal set of innocent injured men: and their hopes of success from this application, very soon appeared by the resignation of the eight remaining directors almost immediately after.

Yet notwithstanding the above intimation, the new directors persisting in their pacifick sentiments, and moderation; made up the vacancies occasioned by these resignations, by electing eight of those who had been removed at the general election; who all refused to serve agreeably to their
old

old principle, that if they could not act despotically, they would not act at all.

The junto now exerted every effort in their power to injure the incorporate body; strengthening their party, with every member, whether of note or otherwise, whom they could by any art seduce from the society, and prevail upon to forfeit their engagements: their scheme was communicated to these, under strict injunctions to secrecy, till such time as they should obtain sufficient assurances of the Royal favour, to render occult management no longer necessary; and therefore large promises, and larger expectations, gave them some success, with such as thought a solemn obligation under their sign manual, of an inviolable attachment to the society and its interests, ought to bind them no longer, than 'till they found a real or imaginary advantage, in entering into as solemn an obligation against it.

The Society however could not apprehend any extraordinary evil from the rage of a disappointed faction, as they were sure his Majesty would not be influenced by any representations, to withdraw his favour from a community, whom he had been graciously pleased to establish by his Royal charter; at least without hearing what could be offered in their defence; and particularly as they were utterly unconscious of having even in thought incurred his displeasure.

But prior to this, and shortly after the society had repealed their resolution to open a publick academy as already mentioned; one of the directors, Mr. Moser, came to the joint proprietors of the academy in St. Martin's Lane, (which as before observed, was supported by the subscription of the gentlemen of the society) and acquainting them, that a Royal academy was shortly to be opened in Pall Mall, to which the society, &c. was to have free access, he
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prevailed on those gentlemen to sign a written instrument, prepared for that purpose, empowering the said Mr. Moser to carry away the anatomical figures, bustoes, statues, lamps, and other effects of the academy aforesaid, to that in Pall Mall; alledging, that as the Royal academy would answer all the purposes of the society, these things would be useless to the present owners, who accordingly on that presumption very readily consented to their removal.

The society were extremely elated with this fresh assurance of a royal academy, and impatient for the time of its opening; but when it arrived, their hopes and expectations were not a little disappointed, to find they must still subscribe or be refused admittance.—So thus a royal name was made use of to deprive them of their effects; in consequence of which they had given up the possession of their academy; they must therefore either loose the season, and opportunity of academic study, for that year,

or submit to the conditions imposed, which being the lesser evil, some chose to do.

The incentives to the above piece of dexterity were these, Mr. Dalton had purchased the lease of an auction room or rooms in Pall Mall, and finding it lay heavy on his hands, his colleague, Mr. Moser, endeavoured to prevail on the society to have their annual exhibitions there; but from the smallness and inconvenience of the apartments, his solicitations were rejected, even by his brother directors; of this Mr. Dalton is said to have complained to a great Personage, as an injury done him by the society; (though their refusal was before he was the apparent proprietor) and at the same time, representing those rooms as admirably adapted to the purposes of an academy, some expressions were dropped, which seemed to indicate an inclination or intention, to purchase the whole concern for that use; he therefore to prevent any ill consequence from a survey or second thoughts,

thoughts, and also to be revenged on the society, made use of the above expedient to give immediate possession; which, as it has since been found necessary, to remove the royal academy from thence to Somerset House, seems to have been a very prudent precaution, and for which he is certainly to be commended.

In these apartments, the junto were to open a separate exhibition in opposition to that of the society at Spring Gardens, with the profits of which the aforesaid royal academy was to be supported as it still continues to be†. This intention of theirs Sir Joshua Reynolds was very early made acquainted with, as he acknowledged to some friends of the society, (who had not the

† The stipends, salaries, &c. of the academicians (council, visitors, professors, &c.) are paid out of the profits arising from their exhibitions; and if there is a deficiency, it is supplied out of the p-avy p-rse.

least apprehensions of his defection at that time, he having through disgust, long withdrawn himself from the publick as well as private meetings of the directors) declaring himself no friend to their proceedings, and, that if they took this step he would not exhibit with them†; from which, and the reasons abovementioned, the society had no doubt of his firmness and attachment to their interest; however, the acquisition of so able an artist, was not to be left unattempted, and therefore when other means failed, something of the possibility of knighthood was hinted, on which, whether influenced by this allurements, or the force of other arguments, we cannot pretend to determine; but certain it is, he changed his former intentions, and joined a set of men, the generality of whom he so lately affected to despise.

† He however did exhibit with them, and was on that account expelled the society with his new associates, the 6th of June following, 1769.

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The society finding by these and some other symptoms, that the junto had met with a reception very different from what was expected; a general meeting was called, and the schemes of the adverse party laid before them, so far as they were then known; in consequence of which they came to a resolution to petition his majesty; which being done accordingly, the society had the pleasure of receiving the following gracious (verbal) answer. " That his majesty repeated his intentions, to continue his royal favour to the incorporated society of artists of Great Britain; that his pleasures were to protect and cherish the arts; that having extended his favour to the society by his royal charter, he had also encouraged the new petitioners, and having at all times great pleasure in promoting and nourishing the arts, he would not withhold his royal favour from any set of ingenious men, who had met together with intention to extend the fine arts, that the society might rest assured, his royal favour should be equally extended to both." So

So gracious and condescending an answer, gave the highest pleasure to the society; who were not a little pleased with their own adherence to a degree of temper which had excluded all recrimination from their petition, how much soever they apprehended the junto to be benefited by it: and this their felicity was still further increased by his majesty, and his most amiable consort's honouring the society's exhibition that year with their royal presence; and likewise ordering a donation of one hundred pounds, to be given as an addition to the annual benefaction of the society.

The incorporate body now expected that as the royal academy (which Mess. Moser and Dalton† had only anticipated for obvious reasons) was now such in reality, they

† They now very freely confess that it was no royal academy when they first gave it that denomination; and affect to laugh at the stratagem made use of to get our public effects, and raise subscriptions, as a piece of wit.

should

should share the benefit of it in common with the royal academicians, at least; to which the promise they received, and the use of their public effects gave them, they thought a right; but the junto thought of nothing less; and therefore to cut short all such expectations, they framed a bye law by which every member not of their body, should, prior to his admission, be obliged to draw a probation figure, to be submitted to their censure; this they knew the old subscribers to the former academy (from whom many of themselves had received instruction) would never submit to, and if they should, it would be their fault if ever they suffered them to become members of the royal academy, since it must be done by an acknowledgement of the justness of their pretensions; which from some former specimens of their candour, the reader must see they were determined never to allow.

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But, as if the assurance of this prohibition was not sufficient, they also assumed an inquisitorial power of determining on the moral, as well as the scientific characters of such as became candidates for admission; and as the opprobrium of being rejected, must be the fate of all those who could not have their approbation in each, the reader will readily perceive what the society were to expect, if they condescended to make the trial. The former transactions of these gentlemen might possibly move our contempt; but this seems calculated to raise our indignation; that they should arrogantly pretend to sit as judges on men of established characters in morals and in science, who know how ill some among themselves are calculated *to excite admiration* on either of these accounts.

The society finding themselves thus shut out from the royal academy, so contrary to their expectations, were obliged to come to a resolution to establish one of their
own,

own *, for themselves and their pupils; they therefore humbly applied to have their aforefaid necessaries and effects restored, and received intimations, that they should be returned accordingly, or their value in money; they waited therefore with great patience and resignation, 'till the approach of the season made it necessary that they should apply again, when they received — no answer.

They therefore were obliged to take an apartment proper for an academy, and

* The society humbly acquainted the king with the straits they were driven to, and begged he would not consider this as a step taken to oppose or displease his majesty, for whom they had the most dutiful, loyal and immoveable respect and affection; but were constrained to it on account of themselves and their pupils: yet still, if it met with the least disapprobation from his majesty, they would desist, and submit to any inconvenience and distress rather than incur his displeasure; to which he was most graciously pleased to answer, that the society had his entire approbation in erecting an academy.

having every thing to purchase new, were at a very great expence to furnish it; but having no alternative they submitted to it with patience.

Though this step in one sense disappointed the royal academicians (who intended the society should have no place for the education of their pupils) they resolved it should answer their purpose in another; and therefore on the society's opening their academy, they laid hold of this as a favourable, and probable circumstance to give his majesty a disadvantageous opinion of the incorporate body; by assuring him this undertaking was meant entirely to oppose the royal academy, and frustrate his gracious intentions: — and indeed from what has appeared, we fear this candid representation has had some of the effects they wished or intended by it; as their majesties have never since visited the society's exhibitions.

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The junto are now almost in possession of their wishes, to compleat which, they are daily labouring to increase their numbers by propagating an opinion, "that to continue with the chartered body is highly dangerous; as their majesties (whose names they make somewhat free with on these occasions) consider all such as disaffected;" with many other devices equally laudable, to gain revolvers from the society; but in this perhaps, they are not so much to blame, as they have had the example of some, *far their superiors*, who have descended to solicitations of the same kind; and, what is worse, have been refused.

Yet with all these efforts of industry and management, the royal academicians still find themselves weaker than they expected; to remedy which, they, as the last inducement to others, luckily contrived to have the modest appellations of *ablest and most respectable artists resident in Great Britain,*

tain, applied to themselves and adherents, in a written instrument, called a diploma, which with great gravity is given to each; but what effect it has hitherto had, either on the world or themselves, or whether it has created most laughter or respect, we shall (at least for the present) leave undetermined.

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